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ABSTRACT

This study, conducted at a laboratory school connected with the University of Pittsburgh, examined student perceptions of teaching competencies of both master teachers and intern teacher trainees. The trainees were graduate students participating in a Master of Arts in Teaching degree program. Two primary classrooms (comprised of a multi-aged grouping of first and second grade students) assessed the competencies of the master teachers as well as the trainees. The Student Perception Instrument of the Teacher Performance Assessment Instruments assessed two areas: (1) competencies in classroom procedures; and (2) competencies in interpersonal skills. The results supported the conclusion that primary aged students do not discern the gradation of teaching competencies of novice and master teachers. It is suggested that perceptions of young children may not be reliable for the evaluation of teaching competencies. (JD)

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MEASUREMENT OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING COMPETENCIES

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MEASUREMENT OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING COMPETENCIES

Introduction

A central function of the majority of the institutions that are members of the National Association of Laboratory Schools (NALS) is the preparation and training of new teachers (NALS Directory, 1986-87). The perceived importance of the pre-service practicum is reflected in the literature that reveals that classroom teachers typically indicate that their college courses were too theoretical and too impractical (Marso and Pigge, 1987), and that the strongest influence on their learning to teach was their student teaching experience (Koehler, 1988). Moreover, the completion of a teacher education program does not prepare the incumbent for the many challenges of teaching. Veenman (1984) reported a "remarkable homogeneity" in the conclusions of 91 studies on the problems of beginning teachers. The most frequently reported difficulties of novices included discipline, motivating students, and accommodating for individual differences. A descriptive study (Fogarty, Wang and Creek, 1983) of the instructional processes employed by novices and experienced teachers exposed the failure of novices to implement a variety of responses to pupil performance and to draw upon prior knowledge when working with children. There is substantial data to support the fact that experience contributes to performance.

In the typical laboratory school it is a common experience

for students to be simultaneously exposed to more than one instructional model. These instructors have varying levels of competence and experience, ranging from student teacher, graduate student, to master teacher. Although the hierarchy of teaching expertise may be perceived by the teachers themselves and by the parents of the children, there is little information available that reveals the ability of pupils to discern the variance in the competencies of their teachers.

Objectives

A study was designed at Falk Laboratory School, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to examine student perceptions of teaching competencies of both master teachers and intern teacher trainees. Intern teacher trainees are post-baccalaureate students participating in a Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree program. The MAT internship is a graduate program in the Department of Instruction and Learning, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh. The program is comprised of 48 credits. It extends over four terms beginning with the Summer session and continues for a full calendar year plus an additional Summer session. During this year the interns in this study spent each week of the school year at Falk Laboratory School. The one hundred eighty day clinical experience at the laboratory school involves teaching responsibilities during school hours which are monitored by the classroom teacher to whom each intern is assigned and formal classes held after school hours.

Data Collection

Student perceptions of teaching competencies were quantified using the Student Perception Instrument of the Teacher Performance Assessment Instruments (TPAI), (Capie, 1979). This instrument assessed two areas: 1) competencies in classroom procedures (CP) and 2) competencies in interpersonal skills (IS). Specifically, classroom procedures evaluated the teacher's cognitive interaction with learners as well as skills in organizing and presenting instructional activities, i.e., motivational techniques, teaching strategies, discipline, etc. Interpersonal skills evaluated the teacher's personal interactions related to classroom climate and performance during instruction.

Two primary classrooms (comprised of a multi-aged grouping of first and second grade students), assessed the competencies of the master teachers as well as the intern teacher trainees. Each primary classroom was composed of twenty-four children. The first competency assessment was administered in the beginning of the teacher training period (October, pre-test), and the second test was administered at the end of the program (May, post-test).

Results

The scoring procedure of the Student Perception Instrument converted the semantic differential responses of "never, sometimes, and often" to numerical equivalents of 1, 3, and 5, respectively. The data indicate (Figure 1-4) that there was no overall significant difference in pre versus post-test scores of the intern teachers or the master teachers. Figures 5 and 6 report pre and post-test scores (total scores) of the interns and

the master teachers. A significant difference was noted on Figure 5 (intern versus master teacher) but no significant difference in total post-test scores.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The results of this study support the conclusion that primary aged students do not discern the gradation of teaching competencies of novice (intern) and master teachers. The present study therefore supports the notion that laboratory schools involved in teacher-training programs do not influence primary aged students' perceptions of teaching competencies. The data indicate that teacher trainees overall are viewed to be as competent as master teachers. The results suggest that the perceptions of young children may not be reliable for the evaluation of teaching performance. The Falk Laboratory School study on the measurement of student perceptions of teaching competencies has raised an additional research question: Do students at other grade levels, i.e., intermediate, and middle school perceive competencies of teacher trainees similarly? Further research in student perceptions of teacher competence is needed. Future research directions of Falk Laboratory School will specifically investigate these research questions.

FIGURE 1. COMPARISON OF TOTAL SCORES ACHIEVED ON NOVICE VERSUS MASTER EVALUATION

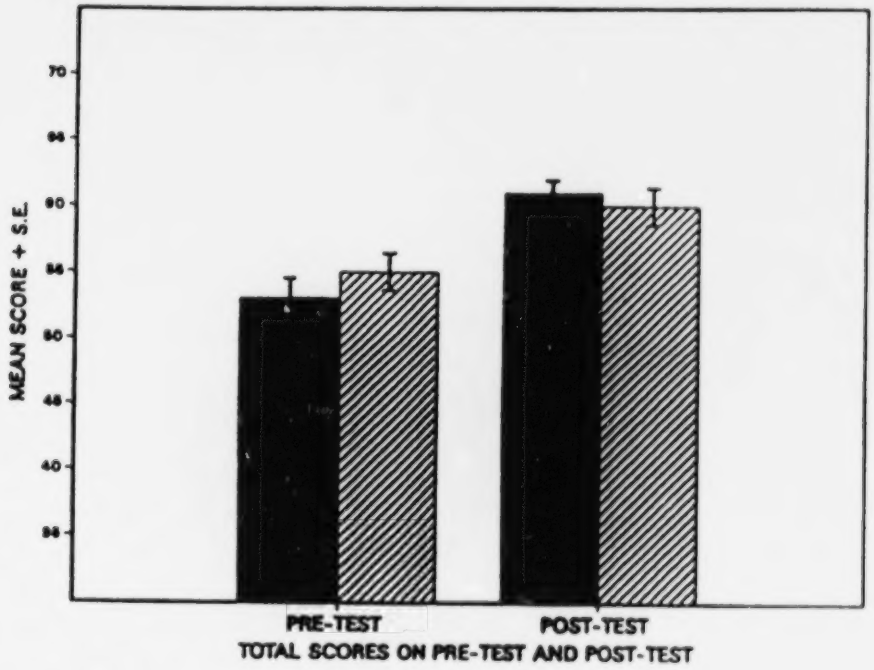


FIGURE 2. PRE-TEST - COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES ACHIEVED ON NOVICE VERSUS MASTER EVALUATION

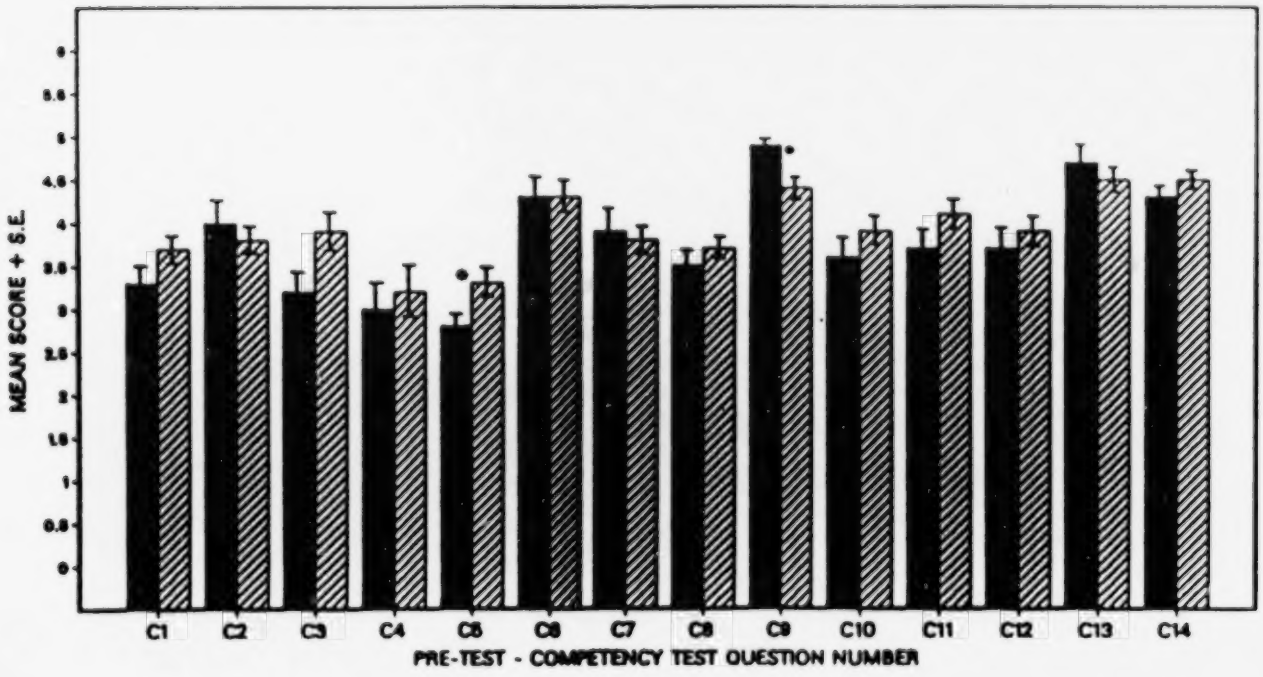


FIGURE 3. POST-TEST - COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES ACHIEVED ON NOVICE VERSUS MASTER EVALUATION

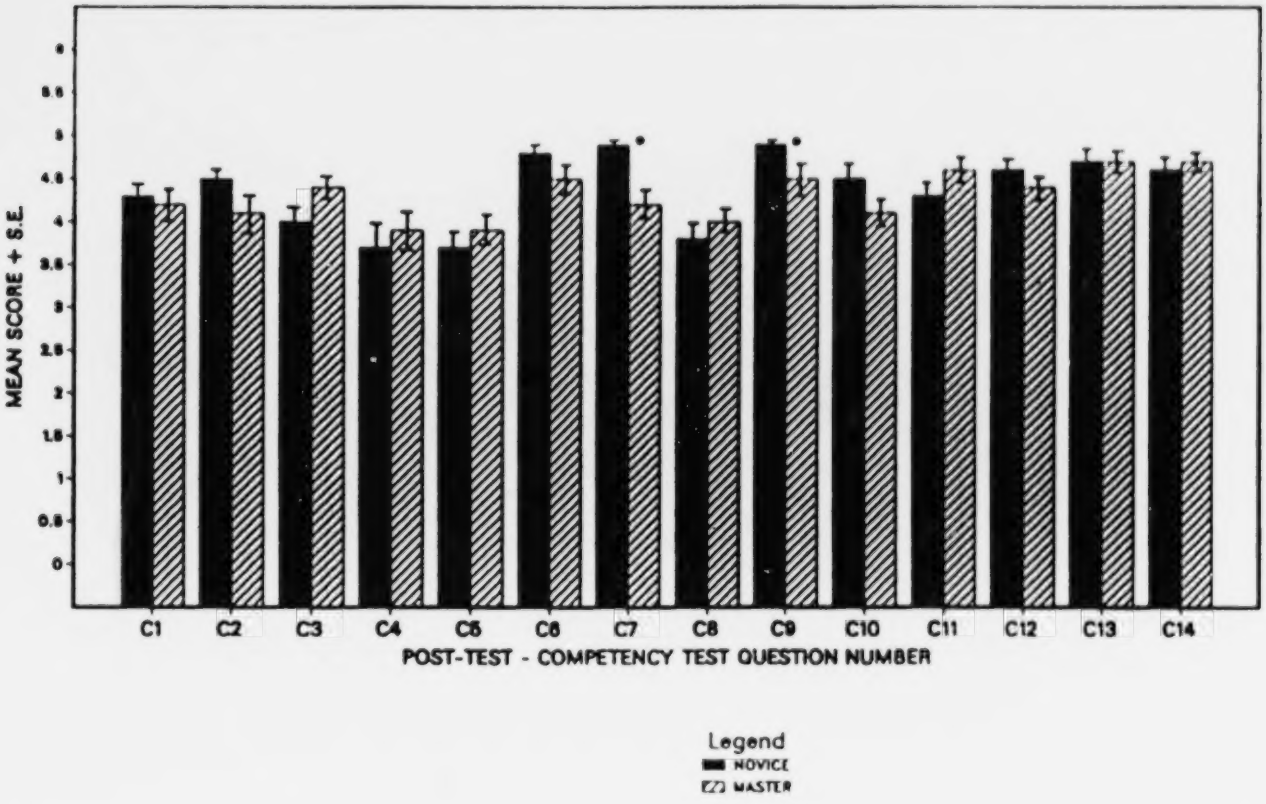


FIGURE 4. COMPARISON OF TOTAL SCORES ACHIEVED ON PRE-TEST VERSUS POST-TEST AS DETERMINED BY A NOVICE OR MASTER

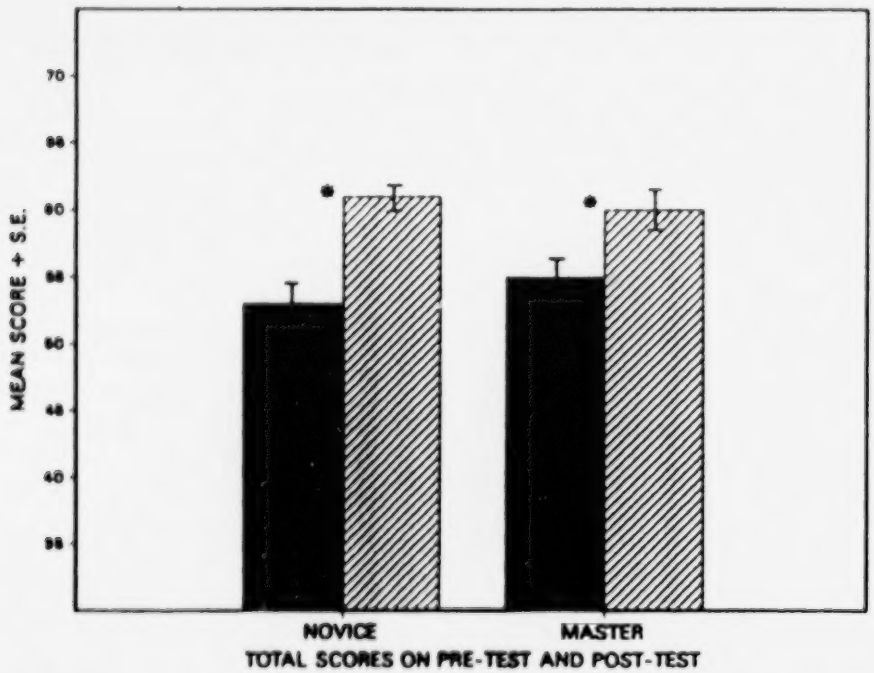


FIGURE 5. NOVICE - COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES ACHIEVED ON PRE-TEST VERSUS POST-TEST

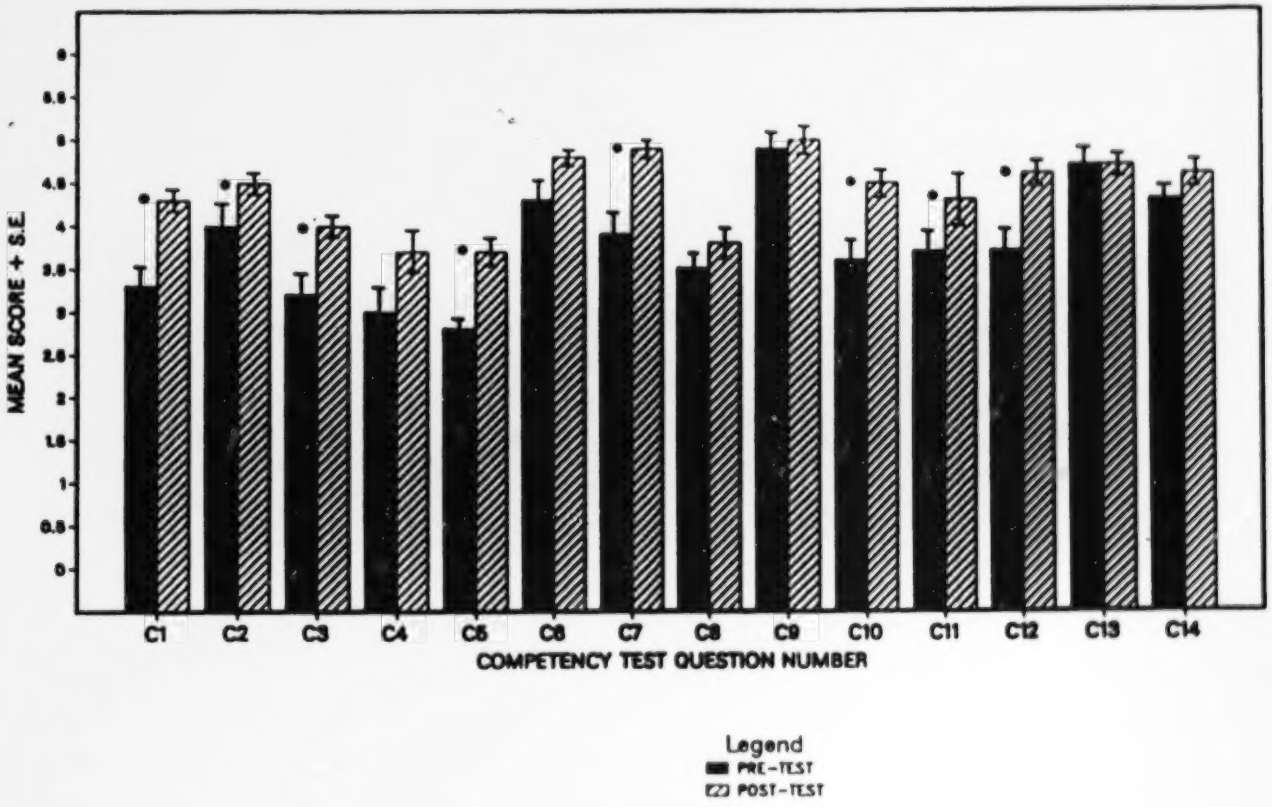
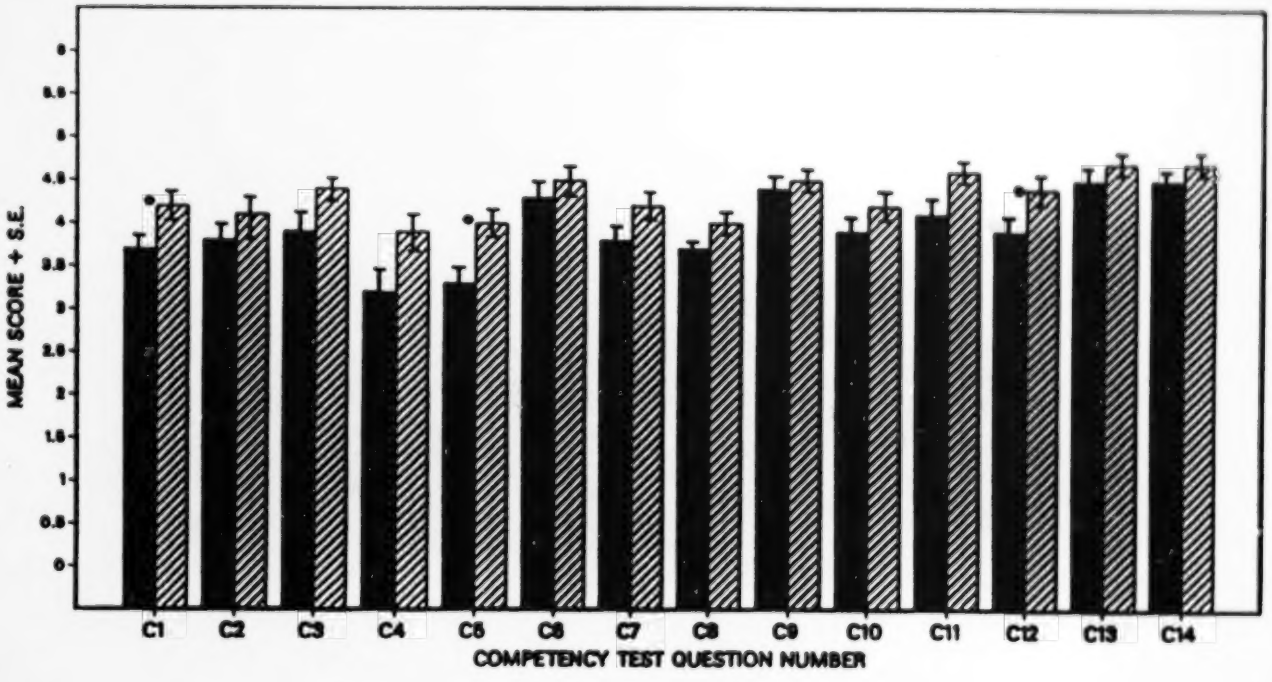


FIGURE 6. MASTER - COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES ACHIEVED ON PRE-TEST VERSUS POST-TEST



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